

## Al-Fārābī and His Interpretation of Aristotle's Ousia

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### ABSTRACT

In ten of his works, Al-Fārābī discusses ousia/substance and its derivatives. Among these works, we frequently encounter quotations from Aristotle and Al-Fārābī's interpretation of them. He accepts the established meaning of ousia as substance and doesn't argue against its translation to *maujūd*, *Eyn*, *maahiy[y]at* and *zāt*. This article tries to show the similarities and differences between Al-Fārābī and Aristotle conceptions of substance and then to bridge between the two innovative theories of Al-Fārābī: one in his division of existence and another regarding his view on reality. In discussing the concept of substance, Farabi seeks to create a unity between Plato and Aristotle's views. In another way, this claim can be expressed that Farabi aims to create a unity between the book of metaphysics and Aristotle's treatise on categories. In this direction, his innovative theory of substance is born. Also, this paper shows some inconsistencies existing in his discussion, which makes his philosophical language even more ambiguous than Aristotle's in Metaphysics and subject to various interpretations. Finally, the relation between the concept of substance and the concepts of *shai* and *tashakhkhus* is discussed.

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## Extended Abstract

### Introduction

In discussing the concept of substance, Al-Fārābī seeks to create a unity between Plato and Aristotle's views. It can be argued in another way that Al-Fārābī seeks to create a unity between the book of *metaphysics* and Aristotle's treatise on *categories*, and it is in this direction that his innovative theory of substance is born. Aristotle, in his treatise on *metaphysics*, considers ousia or substance as the same external particular thing such as "this tree is here" (Aristotle, 1998: 207); Or in another place in the same book, he considers the agent of distinguishing a thing from another thing to the substance, that is, its form. However, in his treatise on *categories*, he considers the essential concepts that are imprinted on foreign things in mind (Ackrill 1975: 2) as Plato, but unlike Plato, Aristotle believes the place of these concepts in mind (Ritter et al., 2014: 28); Al-Fārābī now states that it is both an external thing of substance and a concept derived from it; In the sense that external substance first exists, the external thing is a real substance, but in that the concepts derived from that thing are more stable and durable than an external thing, They take precedence over the substance. Among Al-Fārābī's works, in ten treatises and books, substance and its derivatives have been discussed in a scattered manner. In this article, we have stated all these cases and analyzed them.

### Al-Fārābī's Innovation in the Discussion of Theory of Substance

Following this, Al-Fārābī's innovative theory of substance emerges in two ways: The first is that it leads to a new division of the external thing that Al-Fārābī calls "*maujūd*." The second case goes back to Al-Fārābī's view of reality. The second case goes back to Al-Fārābī's view of reality. Explain that, unlike Aristotle (who saw the identity, Personality, and color of objects as their form or Substance, meaning that objects are indeterminate and colorless substances to which God gives substantial color to them) Al-Fārābī, identifies objects (creatures) with their existence, which means that creatures are in the first place a senseless and colorless thing that God to give existence to them. In the text of the article, we have discussed these initiatives in detail.

### Problem Statement

Thus, in discussing Al-Fārābī's concept of Substance, we encounter the following questions: What is Al-Fārābī's translation and interpretation of Aristotle's ousia? Is Al-Fārābī influenced by Aristotle's treatise on *categories* or the book of *metaphysics*? What could be the difference between Al-Fārābī's and Aristotle in the concept of Ousia or Substance? Is Substance a Quiddity or Being? If it is a kind of Being, why? And if it is of the Quiddity type, why? Are there any contradictions and ambiguities in Al-Fārābī's words in this discussion? If yes, where does it come from? According to Al-Fārābī's, what is the relationship between Substance and Personality? What is the connection between Thing and Being with Substance? What is the relationship between "being necessary in itself" and Substance?

## Literature Review

Regarding literature review, no research has been done on this subject and issues among Iranian works. There is only one thesis that has been written and guided by us, and this article is, in fact, an abstract and its principle. Among the foreign works, only one article was found to be almost related. As its title suggests, it only briefly references Al-Fārābī in the letters about the primary and secondary Substance and ignores our problems in this article (Javadi 2007, 67-77).

## Assuming the Meaning of Substance for Ousia

Al-Fārābī considers Aristotle's Ousia to mean substance; He has assumed the choice of the word of substance for Ousia (Khosravani; Mahboubi 1399: 66-68). Instead of answering why the substance was chosen, as an equivalent of Ousia and other equations were not chosen, Al-Fārābī only explains the substance. In other words, Al-Fārābī presupposes that Ousia means substance. Since Al-Fārābī was not fluent in Greek, he even made erroneous statements in translating some words such as "Sophistic" (Davari, 2002: 19). Al-Fārābī, when confronted with the Arabic translations of his time, which considered the equivalent of the ousia to be substance, only explains and defines the concept of substance; Perhaps this has led to a greater tendency towards *categories* and the topic of definition and Quiddity; Because in *categories* Aristotle also considers universes as substance, but in metaphysics, he has renounced this opinion and considers the object of outside the mind as ousia; With this interpretation of ousia, the equivalent should not be substance, but "Eyn" or "maujūd" will be the best equivalent. Al-Fārābī spoke sporadically of the substance and its types, and in some of the above-mentioned works, he either repeated the discussions about the substance or spoke similarly.

## Conclusion

Al-Fārābī, like Aristotle, is ambiguous in his works on key philosophical topics such as Being, Substance, Thing, Quiddity, and Essence. Somewhere the object is called "Thing;" And in other places Being or Substance. The secondary substance is sometimes interpreted like Aristotle in the Book of *Categories*. Since Substance is more durable than external partial Substance, it is more worthy of being Substance; And sometimes Substance is only an "external particular thing." It is as if somewhere the personality of thing recognizes the Being, as Mulla Sadra points out; Elsewhere, he knows the personality of thing as Aristotle; And what makes one Thing different from another Thing is the "thing itself," which is sometimes called Identity, sometimes Essence, and sometimes Substance. Substance is sometimes referred to as "Quiddity" which does not exist until it is granted existence; And sometimes "Being" that it is neither **on** a subject nor **in** a subject. Somewhere he admits that the true definition of anything, including substance, is beyond human power, and sometimes offers definitions as if they were the true definition of Substance. It is natural, of course, that one who seeks to reconcile the views of Aristotle and Plato, who are fundamentally different in metaphysical foundations, in this way his words become more ambiguous than those of Aristotle.